

Message Text

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ACTION DHA-02

INFO OCT-01 SS-14 ISO-00 EA-06 IO-06 CA-01 CIAE-00
DODE-00 SY-02 NSAE-00 NSC-05 L-01 SP-02 INR-05
/045 W

-----110750 070840Z /17

P R 070720Z NOV 77
FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 650
INFO USMISSION GENEVA
AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR
AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 BANGKOK 27683

LIMDIS

EO 11652: GDS
TAGS: SREF TH
SUBJECT: REFUGEE POLICY

1. UNDER THE PRESSURE CREATED BY THE RECENT INCREASE IN REFUGEE ARRIVALS, THE RTG HAS MADE CLEAR TO THE UNHCR TEAM LED BY PROTECTION DIVISION DIRECTOR JAEGER THAT IT INTENDS TO IMPLEMENT ITS MORE RESTRICTIVE REFUGEE POLICY BEGINNING NOVEMBER 15. THE RTG HAS INFORMED THE UNHCR THAT IT WILL MAKE A DISTINCTION BETWEEN REFUGEES AND ECONOMIC IMMIGRANTS COMING ACROSS LAND BORDERS AND IS ESTABLISHING PROCEDURES FOR MAKING THESE DETERMINATIONS AT DISTRICT, PROVINCE AND PROVINCIAL GOVERNOR LEVEL. IN ADDITION, MOI OFFICIALS CONFIRMED THEIR TOUGH STANCE ON REJECTING NEW BOAT CASE REFUGEE ARRIVALS. SUMMARY OF UNHCR VISIT CONTAINED SEPTTEL.

2. AS WE HAVE REPORTED REGARDING BOAT CASES, RTG IS ALREADY EMBARKED ON POLICY OF REFUSING ENTRY TO NEWLY ARRIVING BOATS THAT ARE SEAWORTHY DESPITE CONCERNS EXPRESSED BY OURSELVES AND UNHCR. RTG PROVINCIAL
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OFFICIALS IN SONGKHLA HAVE OVER PAST THREE WEEKS TAKEN A SERIES OF RESTRICTIVE MEASURES, INCLUDING REFUSAL TO ALLOW ENTRY OF SEAWORTHY BOATS AND THE PRECIPITOUS FORCED MOVEMENT OF OVER 500 REFUGEES OFF THEIR BOATS INTO A TEMPORARY DETENTION CENTER. (LATEST INCIDENT INVOLVING REFUSAL OF ENTRY TO REFUGEE BOATS WAS NOVEMBER 3 WHEN SONGKHLA PROVINCIAL OFFICIALS

USING PHYSICAL FORCE TURNED BACK TO SEA TWO BOATS, ONE HAVING RETURNED AFTER BEING TURNED OUT TO SEA PREVIOUSLY.) SITUATION IN LAEM SING CAMP IS LESS TENSE AT PRESENT BUT THERE ARE AT LEAST TENTATIVE PLANS TO ADOPT TOUGHER POLICY.

3. AS A RESULT OF OUR INTERVENTIONS WITH THE MOI AND THE EXTRAORDINARY EFFORTS OF THE UNHCR, OUR REFUGEE OFFICE/INS TEAMS, AND OTHER EMBASSIES IN PROCESSING BOAT REFUGEES, WE HAVE BEEN ABLE TO EASE THE SITUATION TEMPORARILY IN THE TWO SONGKHLA CAMPS WITH REGARD TO THE REFUGEES NOW ON SHORE. HOWEVER, ATMOSPHERE THERE REMAINS TENSE AND THERE IS ALWAYS POSSIBILITY OF SOME CLASH BETWEEN THE VIETNAMESE REFUGEES AND PROVINCIAL OFFICIALS. IN ANY EVENT, WE HAVE BOUGHT AT MOST ONLY A BRIEF RESPITE IN BOAT CASE CAMPS. SENIOR RTG OFFICIALS ARE NOW AWARE THAT OUR PRESENT PROGRAM AND THE PROGRAMS OF OTHER COUNTRIES WILL LEAVE A NUMBER OF PRESENT BOAT CASE REFUGEES IN CAMPS AND WILL PROVIDE NO SIGNIFICANT RELIEF IN TERMS OF INCREASING NUMBERS OF BOAT CASE REFUGEES NOW ARRIVING. IT MAY BE ONLY A MATTER OF TIME BEFORE RTG PROVINCIAL OFFICIALS BEGIN AGAIN TO EXERT SERIOUS PRESSURES TO FORCE OUT THOSE MORE RECENTLY ARRIVED BOAT CASE REFUGEES NOT ACCEPTED IN OUR OR OTHER PROGRAMS.

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4. WE DO NOT HAVE AS CLEAR A PICTURE OF WHAT WILL HAPPEN IN THE INLAND CAMPS IF RTG MOVES TO ENFORCE ITS NEW POLICY ALONG BORDERS WITH LAOS. WHETHER THAI WOULD FORCE REFUGEES BACK IN FACE OF LPDR REFUSAL TO ACCEPT THEM REMAINS A QUESTION. HOWEVER, THE RTG WOULD LIKE TO USE VIENTIANE NEGOTIATIONS WITH LPDR TO GET SOME MECHANISM FOR LPDR ACCEPTANCE OF THOSE WHO DO NOT QUALIFY UNDER THE NEW RTG RESTRICTIVE DEFINITION OF REFUGEES. ALSO RTG HAS ASKED UNHCR TO TAKE SOUNDINGS WITH LPDR RE ASSURANCES OF SAFETY FOR THOSE WHO MIGHT WISH TO RETURN.

5. IT WILL TAKE SEVERAL MORE WEEKS BEFORE WE WILL BE ABLE TO SEE HOW THE RTG WILL APPLY ITS NEW POLICY IN THE NORTH AND NORTHEAST. IT SHOULD BE NOTED THAT A GOOD DEAL OF THIS THAI ACTIVITY IS AIMED AT THE DOMESTIC AUDIENCE AND AT DISCOURAGING POTENTIAL REFUGEES FROM COMING OVER.

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/045 W

-----110875 070839Z /17

P R 070720Z NOV 77
FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
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AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 BANGKOK 27683

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6. IN THIS SITUATION WE HAVE, AT ALL LEVELS, BEEN TRYING TO IMPRESS ON RTG OFFICIALS HUMANITARIAN CONSIDERATIONS INVOLVED, PARTICULARLY IN THEIR TREATMENT OF THE BOAT CASE ARRIVALS. WE HAVE ALSO POINTED OUT THE SIGNIFICANT DAMAGE RTG WOULD DO TO ITS INTERNATIONAL IMAGE BY A RIGID POLICY INVOLVING REFUSING ENTRY TO BOAT CASE REFUGEES AND THEIR FORCEABLE RETURN TO SEA AS WELL AS ANY ACTIONS TO FORCE LAO REFUGEES BACK. WE WILL CONTINUE OUR EFFORTS HERE BUT BELIEVE THAT WE ARE VERY NEAR THE ENDO OF THE STRING IN DEALING WITH RTG BOAT CASE PROBLEM ALONG OUR PRESENT LINES. HOPEFULLY THE CURRENT VISIT OF MR JAEGER AND THE REMONSTRATING WHICH HAS BEEN DONE AT MANY LEVELS WILL HELP COOL THE BOAT PROBLEM, BUT WE ARE NOT SURE. WE WILL SOON FORWARD SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS TO KEEP UP SOME TEMPO IN BOAT IASE DEPARTURES FROM THAILAND AFTER THE PHASE II INS-APPROVED REFUGEES LEAVE THE CAMPS.

7. TO GIVE FURTHER WEIGHT TO OUR PRESENT EFFORTS,
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WE ALSO RECOMMEND THAT DEPARTMENT CONSIDER MOVING
ALONG FOLLOWING LINES:

A. SUGGEST TO UNHCR THAT HIGH COMMISSIONER HIMSELF
CONSIDER EARLY VISIT TO THAILAND, SOON AFTER NEW
GOVERNMENT INSTALLED. SUCH A VISIT WOULD UNDERLINE
TO NEW RTG LEADERS THE INTERNATIONAL SIGNIFICANCE
OF THE REFUGEE PROBLEM AND PERHAPS SERVE AS CATALYST
FOR RENEWED INTERNATIONAL EFFORTS TO DEAL WITH THE
GROWING NUMBER OF BOAT CASE REFUGEES; AND
B. HAVE AN APPROPRIATELY SENIOR LEVEL DEPARTMENT
OFFICER (HABIB OR HOLBROOKE) CALL IN THAI AMBASSADOR
NOW TO EXPRESS OUR VIEWS, FOCUSING PARTICULARLY ON
BOAT CASE HANDLING. THIS WOULD HELP TO IMPRESS ON
THE NEW GOVERNMENT LEADERSHIP THE IMPORTANCE WHICH
WE ATTACH TO THIS ISSUE.

8. WE RECOGNIZE THAT ABOVE RECOMMENDATIONS ARE
ESSENTIALLY STOP GAP MEASURES. AS NOTED ABOVE THE
NEW RIGID POLICY OF RTG IS A RESULT OF THE MAJOR
CONTINUING INCREASE IN THE REFUGEE FLOW, BOTH BOAT
CASES AND FROM LAOS, WHICH HAVE TAKEN PLACE
OVER THE PAST MONTHS. IN THE ABSENCE OF LONGER
TERM, FOLLOW-ON REFUGEE PROGRAMS BY US AND OTHERS
WE BELIEVE RTG WILL REACT ONLY TACTICALLY AND
TEMPORARILY TO OUTSIDE PRESSURES, PARTICULARLY ON
BOAT CASES.

9. IN OUR VIEW, IT IS IMPORTANT THAT USG MOVE
QUICKLY IN DETERMINING AND ANNOUNCING WHAT OUR FUTURE
ONGOING ROLE WILL BE IN COOPERATION WITH UNHCR,
THAILAND AND OTHER AFFECTED COUNTRIES IN DEALING
WITH THE INDOCHINA REFUGEES. WITHOUT CLEAR, CONCRETE
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INDICATIONS OF CONTINUING INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT
AND ACCEPTANCE OF REFUGEES, THE RTG IS NOT LIKELY
TO BE DETERRED LONG FROM ITS PRESENT COURSE.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: Z
Capture Date: 01-Jan-1994 12:00:00 am
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT, POLICIES
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Sent Date: 07-Nov-1977 12:00:00 am
Decaption Date: 22 May 2009
Decaption Note: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1977BANGKO27683
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D770410-0308
Format: TEL
From: BANGKOK
Handling Restrictions:
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1977/newtext/t19771190/aaaacywa.tel
Line Count: 210
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 546a9521-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION DHA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: LIMDIS
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 4
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: LIMDIS
Reference: n/a
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 18-Feb-2005 12:00:00 am
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 697679
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: REFUGEE POLICY
TAGS: SREF, TH
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odhc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/546a9521-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
22 May 2009
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009